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## ST. CLAIR COUNTY

### St. Clair Commission makes changes to voting precincts

By Kellie L. Long  
09-10-2008

ST. CLAIR COUNTY — To make sure the November presidential election is held in the county, the County Commission, under the direction of a federal court, made changes Tuesday to five voting precincts.

County attorney Bill Weathington said that in a case filed by the federal government against the state of Alabama, a judge appointed Gov. Bob Riley as a special master charged with compiling information and reporting to the court any issues with voter security.

In Riley’s report, he stated to the court that, “in one county of Alabama, St. Clair, and possibly in one or two other counties, the chief county election official, the probate judge, and/or the county commission, have allowed or are allowing the Voter Registration system and its election management component to be used in an inappropriate and illegal manner, which exposes the process to abuse and voter fraud.”

Weathington said the report further states that the problem arises in five precincts where voters can cast a ballot in more than one location.

In these five precincts, a full and complete copy of the voter list is given to poll workers to verify who is eligible to vote. Names of registered voters are appearing on more than one list, which, in theory, could result in voter fraud if that person could vote in more than one place.

“We have five precincts with more than one voting place,” Weathington said. “The voting list is printed and sent to each polling place. In theory, a voter could vote in each place. The lists are always crosschecked to make sure a person didn’t vote more than once. This order tells us to correct a potential problem — not one that exists already.”

Also in the order from the court, the judge stated that “no voting official shall participate in the conduct of a federal election in which a voter is capable of voting in more than one voting location.”

Weathington said the November presidential election could be affected by

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this order if the report's issues were not addressed immediately.

"We have a federal election coming up in less than 60 days," he said. "Until this is cleared up, we can't hold a federal election in St. Clair County. So, it's either do this or have the next presidential election not count in St. Clair County or prevent the election officials from holding the election at all."

The counties in question have an opportunity to correct the situation. In St. Clair, the commission brought the county into compliance by approving new district lines inside the five precincts in question.

Weathington said new district lines had to be drawn where the names only appear on one list that requires the voter to vote in his or her place of residence.

Weathington said the district line changes to the five precincts would be submitted immediately to the Department of Justice for an expedited review.

"I'm confident we'll get the pre-clearance because this is all under a court order," he said.

Commissioners voted unanimously to adopt the new district lines for the five precincts and to allow Weathington to send the maps and resolution to the Department of Justice to petition for the pre-clearance. It also directs the election be held in accordance with law and the judge's order.

The precincts involved in the district line changes include Precincts 1 (Ashville/Friendship), 3 (Branchville/Odenville), 15 (Eden/Pell City), 8 (Poplar Springs/Gum Springs/Odom), and 27 (Chandler/Gallant VFD/Slate).

The precincts will have new district lines but Weathington and Board of Registrars Chairman Buell Plemmons said voters should not have any problems at the polls as long as they vote at the location assigned to them on their registration card.

"People have already been told where they are supposed to vote," Plemmons said. "Their voter card already tells them that. They must vote where that card says and there will be no problems."

Commission Chairman Stan Batemon said the resolution would bring the county into compliance with the judge's order.

"This won't end the discussion that these laws must still be streamlined to be better for the citizens and not just election officials," he said. "It's confusing and complicated for our citizens. We'll continue to try to do that, but in the meantime, we've got to be in compliance."

"We're under duress doing this. It will cause people to show up and vote where they're not supposed to, and then they'll have to go somewhere else to vote."

#### About Kellie L. Long

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