

We need voters and they need to know their votes count

One benefit of the current fiasco over whether or not we can trust election outcomes is that public interest in elections is high, even when a presidential race is not dominating the news. We must capitalize on this heightened interest.

Much progress has been made in NY. Early voting improved access to the polls enormously, but much needs to be done to improve early voting, especially ensuring placement of early voting sites in population centers, including college campuses, and extending hours. Restoring voting rights to the formerly incarcerated is a huge step toward fairness in access. There have been many other improvements, too, but much more is needed.

Administration of elections is so much more than what voters see at the polls. Board of Elections workers deserve appreciation for running this complex system, but must acknowledge that the system involves more technical expertise at every turn, more than traditional hires can be expected to have.

Bringing people to the polls and providing them with ballots (ie, ensuring that the poll books are well maintained to include all qualified voters) are only the first steps in running elections.

At the polls, the inspectors must be fully trained and able to deal with many kinds of problems, from directing voters to other polling places to providing provisional or affidavit ballots to managing the lines to dealing with machine failures (knowing when to call for service). This is not a job to be left to minimally trained and minimally paid election inspectors. In fact, it requires workers with the kind of wisdom gained from repeated trainings and experience working the polls.

Adequate training and experience would also help ensure that poll inspectors give poll watchers appropriate access to the data they need as the election is proceeding. Faith in election outcomes depends on voters knowing votes were counted accurately. Access to this data is the means of verifying one-ballot-one-voter as long as voting machines are in use. I, and many credentialled watchers I know, have experienced inspector resistance to my being involved in any way. This needs to change.

Voting machines are perhaps the greatest challenge to voters' faith in election outcomes. Hand marked paper ballots counted by hand (or possibly on scanners that have maximum security from hacking) produce the gold standard of trustworthy outcomes. Of course, there need to be ballot marking devices for voters who request

them, but hand marked paper ballots that can be recounted, by hand, if necessary ensure that a record of the voter's intent is available. Voting machines that combine a printer for the ballot marking function and a scanner/tabulator in one machine housing do not offer this assurance. If hacked or misused they can mark on an already cast ballot, destroying the accuracy of the record of the voter's intent. We cannot bring such machines into NY if we care about voters' faith in election outcomes.