



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Eric Adams

Senator Adams in the News: For Starters, New York, Embrace Early Voting

ERIC ADAMS November 14, 2012

For starters, New York, embrace early voting

Election Day was a mess. We need to make it far easier to cast a ballot.

BY ERIC ADAMS

In a testament to New York's resolve, thousands of our citizens struggled bravely through chaos and despair this month after Sandy smashed into our city. But it wasn't just the hurricane that wrought confusion and disorder. Adding insult to injury, one week after the storm, New Yorkers also had to deal with the mess that was our election.

Somehow, despite the long lines and frustration, most who wanted to still managed to vote. But the need for real election reform has never been more obvious.

In my Brooklyn Senate district, we heard from dozens of residents fed up with disorderly voting locations and unhelpful Board of Elections staff. Some even gave up and went home. And let's not forget the voters who were still living without electricity and basic services, or without homes at all. Many wasted hours of precious time and energy waiting to simply mark and scan a ballot.

What a disgrace. But what can we do? We just have to suffer through the Election Day mayhem if we want to vote, right?

Wrong. The state can pass simple voting reforms to save us all from this massive headache and increase voter turnout at the same time.

Let's start with early voting. More than 180 years ago, New York was the first state to hold its election on the first Tuesday in November. Congress then made it the nationwide date 40 years later.

Why? Believe it or not, they picked Tuesday for convenience. Voting was usually done in just one town per county, and it could take some voters as many as two days to travel to vote and return home. And since folks had to be home on weekends for religious services, Tuesday was chosen.

But while 19th Century New Yorkers had farms or family businesses, today we have jobs that require us to work on Tuesdays. That's why the vast majority of states now allow their citizens to vote in the weeks leading up to the election, instead of just on Election Day.

New York is unfortunately not one of those states. We technically have early voting through absentee ballots. But only people who meet the Board of Elections' high standards for an acceptable excuse qualify.

This is unnecessary nonsense. Anyone should be able to vote early for at least a few weeks before the election by mailing in a ballot. Better yet, there should be convenient polling centers where any voter can also just show up in-person and get their voting done early.

Let's also make registering to vote easier. More and more states are either letting citizens register online or at the polls. But New Yorkers have to register weeks beforehand through the mail or by going to the Board of Elections, and many don't know whether or not their registration went through until they show up to vote.

Finally, the Board of Elections has to get serious about training its workers and educating voters. A major reason for the woeful execution of our election on Tuesday was that workers didn't understand the new scan-ballot system, and neither did voters. There also seemed to

be no quality control from polling place to polling place.

At the very least, the BOE could have produced pamphlets or flyers for each site that explained the process and handed them to voters as they walked in.

Without these changes, we will continue to disenfranchise voters and disengage citizens. New York has embarrassingly low turnout - 47th in the nation over the last three elections - and it's been getting steadily worse for years. New York City numbers are even lower.

We don't have a lot of time before the next election. City residents will choose a new mayor and other local leadership next year-and, if the primary day is moved up as some are suggesting, we could be voting again as early as June.

I, for one, don't want to spend that Election Day in line.