

Eliminate the Straight Party vote from the ballot

The potential illegality in "straight party lever" voting is that it is impossible for paper ballot scanners to duplicate the actions of the old mechanical voting machines.

Prior to 1998, voters who used the party lever on the mechanical lever machines could see an 'X' next to every candidate they voted for. They could go down the ballot and change any straight party vote if so desired.

The optical scan machines do not have a lever. There is one arrow on the paper ballot to connect for a straight party vote. There is no feedback. The voter does not see for whom he has voted and does not see if or when the vote has been discarded.

Most voters are not aware that, if after connecting a straight party arrow at the top of the paper ballot, they then decide to mark their ballots in any multi-seat race, the straight party vote in that race is discarded.

Another problem with the straight party vote is that many communities have non-partisan races, particularly at the school committee level. These candidates decide on the largest portion of your local property tax bill and yet in these non-partisan races, there is a huge undervote.

An undervote is defined as the number of votes you could have made and did not. For example, if there is a local partisan or non-partisan race with five seats and there are at least five candidates, and you only vote for two, there are three undervotes. If you don't vote at all in that race, there are five undervotes.

A study of the 2010 election results in local partisan and non-partisan races found:

- 30 communities with partisan town council races, the average undervote was 18%
- 5 communities with non-partisan town council races, the average undervote was 21%
- 20 communities with partisan school committee races, the average undervote was 19%
- 15 communities with non-partisan school committee races, the average undervote was 29%

OCG recommends that you vote responsibly. Go down the ballot and choose your candidates one by one. You can still vote for all candidates for one party, or you can distribute your votes as you see fit, but OCG would like to think that you have thoughtfully selected each candidate for your vote.

The 2010 election raises a new question. Statewide, 6,441 voters chose the moderate party straight party option. Only about 430 are registered with the moderate party. Since there were only two candidates (Governor and Attorney General) on most local ballots, did those who marked the Moderate straight party think they were only declaring their philosophy or did they realize that was their vote?